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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003819

SIPDIS

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TAGS: IZ TU PREL
SUBJECT: TURKISH ENVOY DISCUSSES VISIT OF PRESIDENT GUL TO
IRAQ

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3710
 1B. 11/26 E-MAIL OF M. WILLIAMS (PM/RSAT) TO B.
 PAYNE (NEA/I)

Classified By: POLMIL Minister Counselor Michael H. Corbin for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) During a two-week stint in Iraq in which he focused mainly on supporting efforts to gain a U.S.-Iraqi security agreement, Turkish Special Envoy for Iraq Murat Ozcelik told the Ambassador that leading Shi'a cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani agreed to a visit by Turkish President Gul to Najaf in the second half of December. Ozcelik said Gul would also like to visit the KRG, but realized the extreme sensitivities of this issue. The Ambassador promised U.S. support for the Najaf visit if required. Ozcelik also asked the Ambassador for assistance in having a Turkish-produced armored vehicle being offered for sale to Iraq placed under the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program; we were subsequently informed by PM Bureau that the vehicle does not qualify for FMS. Ozcelik also raised the issue of Turkish interest in Iraqi gas, noting GOT interest in cooperation with the USG on energy sector developments in Iraq and specifically the hope to see more Iraqi gas exported via Turkey. End summary.

PRESIDENT GUL TO MEET AYATOLLAH AL-SISTANI

12. (C) In the course of a series of meetings with the Ambassador - mostly focused on Turkish efforts to support the U.S.-Iraq security agreement - Turkish Special Envoy to Iraq Murat Ozcelik told the Ambassador that he had a very successful trip to Najaf November 21 to meet with Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Ozcelik said that no politics were discussed in the meeting, but said that he had raised with Sistani President Gul's desire to visit Iraq before the end of the year and to meet with Sistani. Ozcelik said Sistani agreed to the visit.

Ozcelik noted that while Turkey had a majority Sunni Muslim population, Turkey wanted to make a point of countering divisions between Sunni and Shi'a and thought the visit to Najaf would be very important. In a more sensitive vein, Ozcelik said Gul was also considering the possibility of a visit to the KRG. "If he goes to the North, we'll need to consider what Maliki will do," Ozcelik said.

13. (C) The Ambassador expressed his unequivocal support for the idea of Gul visiting Sistani in Najaf. The Ambassador said it would be an important statement, since Sistani refused to receive Ahmadinejad there. The Ambassador offered the GoT any support that might be required to facilitate the

visit. He added that the trip to Erbil, however, would be much trickier.

4.(C) In a follow-on meeting, Ozcelik told us that the Gul visit was set for December 21-22 and would cover four cities: Baghdad, Najaf, Kirkuk - accompanied by President Talabani - and Erbil. Ozcelik said that, having spoken with both President Talabani and DPM Barham Saleh, he expected the program to be:

- Day 1 - Arrive Baghdad for meetings with Talabani, PM Maliki, the two Vice Presidents and possibly KRG President Massoud Barzani who they would ask to come to Baghdad. Later in the day, travel to Najaf to meet Sistani, visit the Shrine and then return to Baghdad.

- Day 2 - Fly to Kirkuk for meetings with representatives of all the communities. Then fly on to Erbil for a second meeting with Massoud Barzani.

Ozcelik said there would also be discussions with Barham Saleh on economic cooperation; in particular, the establishment of an industrial free trade zone at the border.

FOREIGN MILITARY SALES

¶5. (C) Ozcelik also told the Ambassador that President Gul had asked him to inquire whether an eight-wheeled armored vehicle being offered for sale to Iraq by FNSS - a joint venture of the U.S.-owned BAE Systems and Turkish-owned

BAGHDAD 00003819 002 OF 002

Nurol- be considered a U.S. system for FMS purposes. (NOTE: Subsequently, PM/RSAT informed us (Ref B) that the FNSS-Nurol armored vehicle does not qualify for the FMS program because it has insufficient U.S. content. Also, BAE - now U.S. owned - was awarded this original co-production contract with Turkey when it was still a UK company. We relayed this information to Ozcelik and the Turkish Embassy. End Note.)

GAS

¶6. (C) Ozcelik briefly discussed the GOT's interest in working with the USG on energy issues, mentioning specifically Ankara's desire to see a significant amount of Iraqi natural gas exported to Europe via Turkish pipelines. Ozcelik noted that Turkish firms are participating in the oil and gas project tenders recently announced by the GOI, and will in some cases partner with U.S. firms to bid on projects. Ambassador noted the sensitivity of hydrocarbons as a political issue, particularly projects in the KRG, but agreed that the USG and GOT have a common interest in expanding foreign investment in Iraq and advancing a clear framework for development of the hydrocarbons sector.

CROCKER